

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1        1.        A system, the system comprising:  
2                a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the  
3        availability of that provider;  
4                a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;  
5                a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications  
6        connection between the user and a selected service provider; and  
7                a fourth logic unit to search a database of service providers for an alternate  
8        service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria and to offer the user an  
9        option of connecting with an alternate service provider.

1                2.        The system of claim 1, wherein the fourth logic unit presents the  
2        alternate service provider if the user fails to connect with the selected service  
3        provider.

1                3.        The system of claim 1, wherein the fourth logic unit presents the  
2        alternate service provider after the user has completed a communication with the  
3        selected service provider

1                4.        The system of claim 1, wherein the service provider is an information  
2        provider.

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1           5.       The system of claim 4, wherein the information provider's  
2 information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1           6.       The system of claim 4, wherein the information provider's  
2 information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1           7.       The system of claim 1, wherein the user's selection of a service  
2 provider is received over a telephone connection.

1           8.       The system of claim 1, wherein the user's selection of a service  
2 provider is received over an Internet connection.

1           9.       The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2 includes a rate of the service provider.

1           10.      The system of claim 9, wherein the rate is determined to be a match if  
2 it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1           11.      The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2 includes subject matter.

1           12.      The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2 includes a combination of separate criteria.

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1           13.    The system of claim 1, wherein a system administrator establishes the  
2   set of criteria.

1           14.    The system of claim 1, wherein a user establishes the set of criteria.

1           15.    The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2   includes a reliability factor.

1           16.    The system of claim 15, wherein the reliability factor consists of a  
2   ratio of successful connections between service provider and previous users to total  
3   attempts between the service provider and previous users.

1           17.    A system for establishing a real-time communication connection  
2   between two parties, the system comprising:  
3           a communications interface; and  
4           a controller computer linked with the communications interface, the  
5   controller computer having:  
6           a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the  
7   availability of that provider;  
8           a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;  
9           a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications  
10   connection between the user and a selected service provider; and  
11           a fourth logic unit to search a database of service providers for an alternate  
12   service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria and to offer the user an  
13   option of connecting with an alternate service provider.

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1           18.     The system of claim 17, wherein said third logic unit attempts to  
2     establish a real-time communications connection between the user and the alternate  
3     service provider.

1           19.     The system of claim 17, wherein the real-time communications  
2     connections is a telephone connection.

1           20.     The system of claim 17, wherein the real-time communications  
2     connections is an Internet connection.

1           21.     The system of claim 17, wherein the first logic unit provides the list  
2     of providers to the user via a web page.

1           22.     The system of claim 17, wherein the second logic unit receives the  
2     user's selection via the web page.

1           23.     The system of claim 17, wherein the third logic unit provides the list  
2     of alternate providers to the user via the web page.

1           24.     The system of claim 17, wherein the service provider is an  
2     information provider.

1           25.     The system of claim 24, wherein the information provider's  
2     information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1           26.     The system of claim 24, wherein the information provider's  
2     information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1           27.     The system of claim 17, wherein the fourth logic unit begins working  
2     only if the third logic unit fails to establish a connection.

1           28.     The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2     includes a rate of the service provider.

1           29.     The system of claim 28, wherein the rate is determined to be a match  
2     if it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1           30.     The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2     includes subject matter.

1           31.     The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2     includes a combination of separate criteria.

1           32.     The system of claim 17, wherein a system administrator establishes  
2     the set of criteria.

1           33.     The system of claim 17, wherein a user establishes the set of criteria.

1           34.     The system of claim 17, wherein the fourth logic unit offers the  
2     option of connecting the user to the alternate service provider after communication  
3     has ceased with the selected service provider.

1           35.     The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria  
2     includes a reliability factor.

1           36.     The system of claim 35, wherein the reliability factor consists of a  
2     ratio of successful connections between service provider and previous users to total  
3     attempts between the service provider and previous users.

1           ~~37.~~     A method comprising:  
2             sending a user a list of service providers with their availability indicated;  
3             receiving from the user a selection of a service provider;  
4             attempting to establish real-time communications between the user and the  
5     selected service provider; and  
6             offering the user an option to connect to an alternate provider.

1           38.     The method of claim 37, wherein the selected service provider  
2     designates an alternate service provider in advance.

1           39.     The method of claim 37, further including searching a database of  
2     service providers for alternate providers who match the selected service provider  
3     based on a pre-established set of criteria.

1           40.     The method of claim 37, wherein the connection established between  
2     the service provider and the user is a telephone connection.

1           41.     The method of claim 37, wherein the connection established between  
2     the service provider and the user is an Internet connection.

1           42.     The method of claim 37, wherein the database is searched and  
2     information about an alternate service provider is sent only if the user fails to  
3     connect to the selected service provider.

1           43.     The method of claim 37, wherein the option to connect to said  
2     alternate service provider is sent after the connection between the user and the  
3     service provider ends.

1           44.     The method of claim 37, wherein the service provider is an  
2     information provider.

1           45.     The method of claim 44, wherein the information provider's  
2     information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1           46.     The method of claim 44, wherein the information provider's  
2     information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1           47.     The method of claim 37, wherein rate is a criterion by which an  
2     alternate service provider is matched.

1           48.     The method of claim 47, wherein a rate is determined to be a match if  
2     it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1           49.     The method of claim 48, wherein the user determines the range of  
2     rates that match.

1           50.     The method of claim 48, wherein a system administrator determines  
2     the range of rates that match.

1           51.     The method of claim 37, wherein subject matter is a criterion by  
2     which an alternate service provider is matched.

1           52.     The method of claim 37, wherein a combination of criteria is used to  
2     determine a match.

1           53.     The method of claim 37, wherein a system administrator establishes  
2     the criteria by which a match is determined.

1           54.     The method of claim 37, wherein the user establishes the criteria by  
2     which a match is determined.

1           55.     The method of claim 37, wherein only service providers that pass a  
2     reliability criterion are considered.



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1           56.     The method of claim 55, wherein reliability is determined based on a  
2     ratio of the number of calls answered by a service provider to the number of calls  
3     placed to the service provider.

1           ~~57~~.    A method of rerouting a user from a selected service provider to an  
2     alternate service provider, the method comprising:  
3           giving the selected service provider an option of sending the user to a  
4     database of service providers when the selected provider can not be reached;  
5           searching the database for an alternate service provider that matches the  
6     selected service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria; and  
7           providing the user with a list of the matching alternate service providers.

1           58.     The method of claim 57, wherein the service provider is an  
2     information provider.

1           59.     The method of claim 58, wherein the information provider's  
2     information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1           60.     The method of claim 58, wherein the information provider's  
2     information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1           61.     The method of claim 57, wherein the user can then select an alternate  
2     service provider and be connected that provider.

1           62.     The method of claim 57, wherein the selected service provider  
2     receives a pre-established percentage of any commission paid to the alternate service  
3     provider.

1           63.     The method of claim 57, wherein the service provider is given the  
2     option of sending the user to the database when the service provider creates the  
3     initial listing with the system.

1           64.     The method of claim 63, wherein the default option is to send the  
2     user to the database.

1           65.     The method of claim 57, wherein the selected service provider is  
2     notified of the missed connection with the user.

1           66.     The method of claim 65, wherein the notice comes in the form of e-  
2     mail.

1           67.     The method of claim 57, wherein rate is a criterion by which an  
2     alternate service provider is matched.

1           68.     The method of claim 57, wherein a rate is determined to be a match if  
2     it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1           69.     The method of claim 57, wherein the user determines the range of  
2     rates that match.

1           70.     The method of claim 57, wherein a system administrator determines  
2     the range of rates that match.

1           71.     The method of claim 57, wherein subject matter is a criterion by  
2     which an alternate service provider is matched.

1           72.     The method of claim 57, wherein a system administrator establishes  
2     the criteria by which a match is determined.

1           73.     The method of claim 57, wherein the user establishes the criteria by  
2     which a match is determined.

1           74.     The method of claim 57, wherein a combination of criteria is used to  
2     determine a match.

1           75.     The method of claim 57, wherein only service providers that pass a  
2     reliability criterion are considered.

1           76.     The method of claim 75, wherein reliability is determined based on a  
2     ratio of the number of calls answered by a service provider to the number of calls  
3     placed to the service provider.

1           77.     A machine-readable storage medium tangibly embodying a sequence  
2     of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method comprising:  
3         sending a user a list of service providers with their availability indicated;

4 receiving from the user a selection of a service provider;  
5 attempting to establish real-time communications between the user and the  
6 selected service provider; and  
7 offering the user an option to connect to an alternate provider.

1 78. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the  
2 selected service provider designates an alternate service provider in advance.

1 79. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, further including  
2 searching a database of service providers for alternate providers who match the  
3 selected service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria.

1 80. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the  
2 connection established between the service provider and the user is a telephone  
3 connection.

1 81. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the  
2 connection established between the service provider and the user is an Internet  
3 connection.

1 82. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the  
2 database is searched and information about an alternate service provider is sent only  
3 if the user fails to connect to the selected service provider.

1           83.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the  
2     option to connect to said alternate service provider is sent after the connection  
3     between the user and the service provider ends.

1           84.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the  
2     service provider is an information provider.

1           85.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 84, wherein the  
2     information provider's information is provided in the form of a recorded  
3     transmission.

1           86.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 84, wherein the  
2     information provider's information is provided in the form of a communication with  
3     a live person.

1           87.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein rate is a  
2     criterion by which an alternate service provider is matched.

1           88.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 87, wherein a rate is  
2     determined to be a match if it is within a predetermined range of the selected service  
3     provider's rate.

1           89.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 88, wherein the user  
2     determines the range of rates that match.

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1           90.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 88, wherein a system  
2 administrator determines the range of rates that match.

1           91.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein subject  
2 matter is a criterion by which an alternate service provider is matched.

1           92.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein a  
2 combination of criteria is used to determine a match.

1           93.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein a system  
2 administrator establishes the criteria by which a match is determined.

1           94.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the user  
2 establishes the criteria by which a match is determined.

1           95.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein only  
2 service providers that pass a reliability criterion are considered.

1           96.     The machine-readable storage medium of claim 95, wherein  
2 reliability is determined based on a ratio of the number of calls answered by a  
3 service provider to the number of calls placed to the service provider.

1           ~~97.~~     A system for establishing a real-time communication connection  
2 between two parties, the system comprising:  
3 a communications interface; and

4 a controller computer linked with the communications interface, the  
5 controller computer having:  
6 a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the  
7 availability of that provider;  
8 a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;  
9 a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications  
10 connection between the user and a selected service provider; and  
11 a fourth logic unit to offer to reconnect the service provider to the user when  
12 the service provider signals availability.

1 98. The system of claim 97, wherein the fourth logic unit also offers a list  
2 of alternate providers

1 99. The system of claim 97, wherein the user can specify the method by  
2 which the service provider is reconnected with the user.

1 100. The system of claim 97, wherein the user can set a time limit on  
2 when to reconnect the service provider.